

Understanding Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a progressive lung disease that over time makes it hard to breathe.

COPD Symptoms

With COPD, the airways in your lungs become inflamed and thicken, and the tissue where oxygen is exchanged is destroyed. When that happens, less oxygen gets into your body tissues, and it becomes harder to get rid of the waste gas carbon dioxide. As the disease gets worse, shortness of breath makes it harder to remain active.

If you experience any of the symptoms listed below, or think you might be at risk for COPD, it is important to discuss this with your primary care physician.

- Chronic [cough](#)
- Shortness of breath while doing everyday activities (dyspnea)
- Frequent respiratory infections
- Blueness of the lips or fingernail beds (cyanosis)
- Fatigue
- Producing a lot of mucus (also called phlegm or sputum)
- Wheezing

Remember: Don't wait for symptoms to become severe. [Early detection of COPD is key to successful treatment.](#)



Key Facts:

1. **COPD is chronic condition. If you have it, you live with it every day.**
2. **It can cause serious long-term disability and can lead to early death.**
3. **There is no cure for COPD, but it is often preventable and treatable.**
4. **COPD is sometimes referred to as chronic bronchitis or emphysema.**



PREVENTION: Reduce Your Risk for COPD

There are steps you can take to protect yourself from COPD.

- **Stop Smoking.**

Quitting smoking is the single most important thing a smoker can do to live a longer and healthier life. The American Lung Association has [many programs to help you quit for good.](#)



- **Avoid Secondhand Smoke.**

Make your home smoke free. You'll not only protect yourself, but your family, too. [Learn about your rights to a smoke free environment at work and in public places.](#)



- **Limit Exposure to Harmful Chemicals.**

Household cleaning products—including soaps, polishes and grooming supplies—often include harmful chemicals. [Protect yourself against chemicals, dust and fumes in your home.](#)



Other risk factors for COPD include:

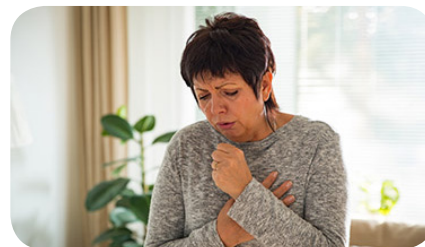
- Air pollution
- Breathing secondhand smoke
- Exposure to chemicals, dust and fumes
- A genetic condition called Alpha-1 deficiency
- A history of childhood respiratory infection

Female smokers are nearly 13 times as likely to die from COPD as women who have never smoked; male smokers are nearly 12 times as likely to die from COPD as men who have never smoked.

How COPD Affects the Body

People with COPD:

- Often experience shortness of breath during daily activities.
- Experience fatigue, chronic cough and frequent respiratory infections as well (see more about [symptoms of COPD](#)).
- Are at risk for other health problems including heart attacks, strokes and lung cancer.
- Can experience mental health issues such as depression.



COPD Can Limit:

- Ability to work
- Normal physical exertion
- Household chores
- Social activities
- Sleeping
- Family activities



[Getting emotional support](#) is just as important as [protecting your lungs](#) and [staying active](#).

